

TICKETS BY TOUCH

By SYLVIA PAINE

Don't walk by that newfangled video screen just inside your neighborhood Rainbow Food store. Stop to relive its thrilling highlights: Gene Larkin's hit to win the 1991 World Series, Kirby Puckett doing high fives, Twins trivia tidbits and rousing music—all reminders of the heroes, great moments and abiding dreams that make baseball the all-American game.

Accept Kirby Puckett's invitation: "Go ahead, touch the screen!" You'll be drawn into the brave new world of sports marketing. It's easy, it's fun and it's convenient, allowing you to purchase Twins tickets around the clock.

Called "That's the Ticket," these 30 automated kiosks—installed in most Twin Cities Rainbow stores, four outstate Target stores and America's Original Sports Bar at the Mall of America, with downtown locations soon to come—let you buy Twins tickets with your credit card and have them printed on the spot. Broadcaster John

Gordon leads you through the process step by step as the screen shows your options. You choose the month and date of the game you wish to see, the number of tickets you need and your seating preference. The screen then reveals the location of the best available seats and allows you to see a view of the field from that general area. If you don't like the view, you may select other seats.

Finally, the screen adds up your charges, including a 15 percent service charge (up to a maximum of \$15 per order), about the same as the charge for phone orders. You must press "Purchase" to activate the charge and receive the tickets. Up to that point, you may cancel the transaction at any time.

Convenience is apparent in many ways. You can buy tickets on the spur of the moment, without waiting for phone lines or ticket windows to open. The kiosk confirms your choices and allows you to correct mistakes immediately.

"There's a great deal of interest around the country in this new system," Twins President Jerry Bell says. "It may change the way tickets are sold for a lot of things, not just baseball."

The first professional sports team in the country to use multimedia kiosks for sports marketing, the Twins



Even Kirby Puckett likes buying tickets the easy way.

embarked on the project in mid-1992. Working with a local company, Information Advantage, the club installed an earlier version of the kiosks at three locations. Research suggested that most people who bought tickets at the kiosks were attracted by the convenience and might not have purchased tickets over the phone or in person.

Last fall Twins Vice President for

Sales and Marketing Bill Mahre gave a presentation about the system at IBM in Rochester. There he met Michael North, whose North Communications in Santa Monica, Calif., is a leader in multimedia technology for public access. One of North's most visible projects is Info/California, which allows California residents to order and pay for birth certificates, find a job, pay for a driver's license and obtain information about health and human services via touch screen.

The Twins and North entered into a joint venture over the winter, with the kiosks designed by North and manufactured by IBM. They were installed this spring at locations where they'd catch the interest of shoppers buying Pampers and Fritos, and where, North says, "the demographics are the same as your baseball fan."

Within the first three days of operation this season, the Twins had sold more than 600 tickets at 10 kiosks. "There's been a lot of interest in them and, more important, in the Twins," Mahre says. "It gives people an easy way to buy Twins tickets."

"My goal is that ultimately 2 to 3 percent of tickets get bought on kiosks," North says, "and that 2 to 3 percent will be virtually all net adds to the existing tickets that get sold."

In late June or early July, the kiosks will introduce more options: You will be able to ask the screen what dates a certain team will be in town and what dates Bat Day, Cap Day and other promotions take place. You also will be able to order Twins merchandise.

By summer's end, Twin Citizens may be able to buy tickets for other sporting events and concerts at the kiosks. The concept has attracted interest from other major league baseball teams, basketball teams and concert venues locally and around the country.

In two or three years, North predicts, fans will be able to use their home TV screens for everything the kiosks now do. "But they're also going to be buying tickets at the supermarket," he says. "That's another technology that will provide a net add to existing ways of buying tickets." □

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